

THE DANCE U.S.S.R.

 Approved For Release 2000/09/11 : CIA-RDP75-00011R000300470020-2
 SEP 19 1954

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Films of Russian Ballet At the Stanley

By JOHN MARTIN

Q Among the best of the Soviet ballet films yet to be seen hereabouts is the one now showing at the Stanley Theatre under the somewhat equivocal title of "Stars of the Russian Ballet." There are some very bright stars in it, to be sure, but it is less an exhibition of their stellar qualifications than a necessarily hasty glimpse of the contemporary Soviet style and approach. As such it is stimulating and revealing.

The program consists of abbreviated versions of three long ballets—"Swan Lake," "The Fountain of Bakhchisarai" and "The Flames of Paris"—adapted in a measure to the frame of the movies. In "Swan Lake," for example, we see part of the story unfolded in the actual out-of-doors, and at the end the Prince wrestles with the wicked magician and hurls him over a cliff into the sea. This breaks his spell over the enchanted maidens, who throw off their swan forms for a happy ending all around. Since most ballet stories are incredible and corny to begin with, this does no major damage, and it serves to give the much reduced versions a reasonably valid form of their own.

It is the dancing, however, that really matters, and that is chock full of interest. The style is extremely sturdy and substantial, and far removed from the flashing and sometimes superficial brilliance that we have developed for ourselves. Everybody is strong technically, and virtually everybody is an accomplished mime. There is an emotional vigor that gives body to the performance as an inevitable result, and there is no *divertissement* that does not have its dramatic justification.

Differences in Style

The women are a great deal more finished than the men, apparently as a matter of course. Though the men do certain steps that we are accustomed to relegate to women, such as a great many *chainé* turns, they do them—and everything else—with enormous athleticism. They are also given to acrobatic lifts that we do not use; for example, very often they frankly stoop, get a solid grip on their partners and heave them up, dead weight and without any assistance, and hold them with straight arms high over their heads. Also, to the comfort of American boys who are always being twittered at for their stretched feet, their feet are all

unstretched, apparently again as a matter of course.

The women, on the other hand, have exemplary feet, with clean, strong points and admirably supple ankles. The port de bras is broader than ours, but if it lacks our accent on formal elegance, it is immeasurably freer and more vitalized. There are, indeed, many variances from our practice in the use of the arms in action.

Nobody is as turned out in the hips as we are used to seeing, and as a result all the arabesques and attitudes have a different line and look. According to one technical expert, this aids greatly in the attainment of both height and breadth in jumping. It perhaps accounts in part for the ability of the men, especially, to do fabulous jumps of various sorts in series without even a preparation in between.

Ulanova appears to wonderful advantage in both the "Swan Lake" and the "Fountain." Besides her beautiful line and her native gift for movement, she has a quiet dramatic power that asserts itself with complete conviction and a minimum of effort. It is in a sense rather like that of a Slavic Margot Fonteyn. In "Swan Lake" she is ever aware of being a swan against her will, which gives her a lovely poignancy. But in "The Fountain," indeed, her performance in the "Fountain," as

the passionately adored captive of the Tatar khan who has killed her lover. The scene between her, the khan (P. A. Gusev) and the jealous Zarema (Maya Pliset-skaya) is a truly remarkable dramatic experience, and one that we could not conceivably duplicate in any of our ballet companies. Gusev is a mine of wonderful power, who gives the khan an impassioned dignity that is hard to forget.

"Swan Lake" contains by way of special interest a Spanish *divertissement* in the final scene that is quite wonderful in a true evocation of the late nineteenth century ballet. It is cast in a dark tone, with long skirts, broad strides and deep backbends. *Divertissements* of this caliber do not actually interrupt the action, no matter how irrelevant they may seem in subject-matter.

"Flames of Paris" is less choreographic and less exciting in the main, but it has its stunning moments. Among them particularly is a fleet and buoyant variation by a girl not altogether easy to identify, but who is probably Y. G. Sangovich.

Others of the "stars" who give distinguished performances are Natalia Dudinskaya and N. M. Sergeyev in "Swan Lake," and the stalwart Vachtang Chabukiani in "Flames of Paris." Chabukiani, in "Flames of Paris," is warmly recommended.

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